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ABSTRACT

A summer Career Guidance Institute, conducted for graduate credit, placed 16 secondary teachers in entry-level positions in jobs not requiring college education for six weeks. The teachers worked four days a week and attended seminars and group discussions one day a week. Study of this pilot program was conducted to investigate three questions: (1) Do educational personnel change their attitudes toward aspects of career education as a result of inservice training that includes first-hand experience with entry-level positions? (2) What are educational personnel perceptions of the process of obtaining and working in entry-level positions? and (3) What are employers' perceptions of the program and ways education can better prepare students for working? Data were collected using an attitude scale and interviews. Results showed little change in teachers' attitudes toward career education, although in most cases these attitudes were already highly positive. Results also showed that teachers gained knowledge about ways to search for entry-level jobs, and appreciation for the people who hold such jobs. Finally, employers were positive about the program. Recommendations for future applications of the program are given. (KC)

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Teachers in the Business World: A Career Guidance Institute

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TEACHERS IN THE BUSINESS WORLD: A CAREER GUIDANCE INSTITUTE

BACKGROUND

Begun under Plans for Progress, the first Vocational Guidance Institute was held in Detroit in 1964. Since that time, the National Alliance for Business has assumed management of the Institutes which have been renamed Career Guidance Institutes (CGIs). Such projects are training programs whose purposes relate to increasing educator familiarity with current business practices. As a result, educational personnel can provide economically disadvantaged and non-college bound students with more effective career counseling. Teachers can match curriculum with employer requirements and student career interests. By increasing the interaction between local business leaders and educators, the Institutes have attempted to develop a teamwork perspective around the issue of job readiness of students leaving high school. CGI participants learn about the career opportunities available to high school graduates. Additionally, these educators become familiar with special problems facing minorities.

This CGI, a six week summer course, offered for graduate credit at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, involved employment of sixteen teachers and counselors by local businesses in entry level positions for four days a week. Each Monday these participants attended seminars on campus led by university, business and local school district personnel. This Institute was funded by the National Alliance for Business and Title VII of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. Both the Greater Charlotte Chamber of Commerce and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools

endorsed the project.

A study of this pilot program was conducted to investigate three questions:

1. Do educational personnel change their attitudes toward aspects of career education as a result of inservice training which includes first hand experience with entry level positions?
2. What are educational personnel perceptions of the process of obtaining and working in entry level positions?
3. What are employers' perceptions of the Teachers in the Business World Program and ways education can better prepare students for working.

METHOD

Subjects

Sixteen public school teachers who work for a large metropolitan Southeastern school district servicing a cross-section of urban and rural students volunteered to participate in this program. Of these teachers, two worked in elementary schools, three at the junior high, and the remaining taught at high school level. The major areas of focus for the 7-12 teachers included business, vocational education, history and English. A school psychologist and counselor were also in the group. Their ages ranged from twenty-four to fifty-one and their years in teaching ranged from one to twenty-two. Nine of the sixteen were black; 5 subjects were male.

Settings

All of the participants were placed in entry level positions in a variety of settings. The jobs and settings included basic office workers in a local publishing company, IBM and temporary services, maid service and food manager in a large hotel chain, processor for personnel forms in a small business, grounds work, laborer in a snack packaging business and manual labor in a steel company.

Instruments

Data were collected using an attitude scale and interviews. The National Alliance for Business Career Guidance Institute Pre- and Post-Test was used to measure educator attitudes toward career education.

This twenty-two item, Likert style questionnaire, has served as an evaluation form for Career Guidance Institute programs across the country. It is designed to assess participant perceptions related to career education issues such as school career programs, business-school relationships, awareness of local business resources and employment opportunities. Teacher interviews were designed to assess perception of self in the business world and classroom implications. Employer interviews examined benefits and problems in the program, employee attitudes toward participants and perceptions of ways schools could better prepare students for the business world.

Procedures

Twenty subjects were recruited through brochures and program presentations to school faculty and vocational education coordinators. Participants were selected on a first-come, first-serve basis. Because of the focus on entry level positions, four potential participants lost interest.

The Career Guidance Institute, a six-week summer course offered for graduate credit, involved employment of the teachers and counselors by local businesses in entry level positions for four days a week. Participants met as a group every Monday during the six-week program. Typically, seminars were held at the University. Sample leaders and topics included a psychologist who presented "Psychology of Work: Organizations and How People Fit"; a sociologist, who discussed "Sex Roles of Men and Women"; and, an economist who presented "Minimum Wage and Child Labor Laws - A Help or Hindrance." Participants learned to assess personal strengths and interests and to match those assets to occupational goals through use of the Richard Boles and John Holland

models for vocational planning. The group also visited community small business projects and heard a panel discussion by new employees with varying educational backgrounds at a local industry. Educators, and representatives from business, industry and local agencies also made presentations.

The sixteen educators were administered the National Alliance for Business Career Guidance Institute Pre- and Post-Test on the first and last days of the project. Each item was analyzed using a one-tailed t test for repeated measures. In addition, educators were interviewed weekly on-campus and on-site, and employers were interviewed twice during the program.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data analysis section is divided into two parts: results from the questionnaire and synthesized interviews.

Questionnaire

Table 1 displays the pre- and post-test mean, standard deviation, t value, and level of significance for six items on the attitude scale which achieved significance (See Table 1 on page 7).

Following their experience in "Teachers in the Business World," participants tended to view their own school programs less positively. In addition, they seemed to place a higher value on teacher awareness of other kinds of work.

Several unique features of this program may have been responsible for slight inflation of results. Incentives for educator participation, including paid active employment as part of a graduate course and reduced tuition, may have caused participants to view the experience with increased favor. However, the effect of the employment factor is diminished by the kinds of jobs available in the program.

Some items did not yield expected results. Since most of the participants were classroom teachers, we had hoped that they would feel increased competence in career guidance; yet responses to the item "career guidance should be handled by specialists rather than regular teachers," remained positive. Participants did mention strategies for career guidance in classrooms during the interviews, however. Slight tendencies were also noted for items "economically disadvantaged students can learn to direct themselves and assume responsibility for career plans" and "wages are the most important motivator for workers." The positive shift on the last

TABLE 1

RESULTS OF TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

ITEM	PRETEST MEAN	SD	POST TEST MEAN	SD	t VALUE	LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE
1. Career choice is a continuous process which takes place over a number of years	4.00	1.03	4.50	.63	-2.24	.02
2. Educators must understand work if our educational system is to prepare young people for working	4.06	.77	4.88	.34	-3.90	.001
3. The present school vocational education course teaches students enough about the world of work	3.31	1.40	2.38	.96	3.03	.004
4. As part of the school program students should be allowed to leave school during the day co observe workers	3.38	1.15	3.88	.96	-2.74	.008
5. Most counselors and teachers in my school have a realistic understanding of the problems facing business and industry in employing economically disadvantaged youth	2.50	1.16	1.81	1.05	2.11	.026
6. Students in my school have adequate opportunity to discuss their future plans with teachers and counselors	2.44	1.09	1.75	1.00	3.15	.004

items may be indicative of the rewards available to entry level positions.

A ceiling effect existed on the pretest on several items; and, therefore, the participants did not show improvement on these items on the posttest. Since the data indicates these volunteers already held positive views toward career education, a further change in a positive direction suggests educators did value the program and gained from their employment experience. Another barrier which lessened the possibility of obtaining positive results is that certain items on the questionnaire are "apple pie" items; that is, their wording elicits automatically positive responses. For example, who could argue with ' "hands on" experiences or other similar designed activities are methods which will bring real meaning to subject matter curriculum areas' or "people should be able to re-enter the educational system when they seek to upgrade their skills or change jobs."

Therefore, this data tends to support the notion that a novel, organized, and varied career education course incorporating work experience can have impact on educators. Interviews tended to reflect more positively on the program than questionnaire results suggesting that motivation of some participants may have been at variance with stated program goals.

Teacher Interviews

The results of the teacher interview will be discussed in the following fashion. The expectations teachers held about the jobs and their actual initial experiences will be discussed first, followed by insights which developed as they gained additional experience. Next to be reported are the changes which teachers believed occurred for them personally as a result of this experience. Finally, the underlying issue

emphasized throughout the program, the effect of this experience on behavior and methods in the classroom as perceived by the teachers who were involved, will be related.

Although participants selected a variety of entry-level positions, they reported similar feelings about their first days at the job site: all of them experienced feelings of nervousness and anxiety. They expressed fear of being in a new situation with unfamiliar norms and expectations. Concerns about role and relationships were expressed most frequently, especially feeling like a stranger. Some wondered about relationships with supervisors and peers. They were concerned that employer and peer expectations of teachers would be different than for other employees or that perhaps blue collar workers would not welcome a teacher in their midst. It became clear from remarks of participants that when one has become established in a profession, fears of stepping outside of that arena are high. Educators worried about their abilities. One confided that, although she was initially excited about the goals for the course, when the interview-day came she did not want to go and thought her job as a housekeeper at a large hotel would be demeaning. She reasoned that because society places low value on unskilled, entry-level roles, the job was beneath her and that she could do better than to work as a maid.

Filling out job applications and being interviewed also resulted in new experiences. Frequently, teachers were surprised at the length and detail of application forms which demanded a relatively sophisticated level of reading ability. Interview procedures varied in format, intensity and intricacy. For hotel work applicants needed an appointment with the personnel manager in advance, before they could be admitted past the guard at the rear door. A small window was opened by the guard and if

information regarding the manager's name and the appointment was not given, potential applicants advanced no further. After applicants were admitted, they received application forms and a long list of company rules. Instructions were given to read the rules and initial the ones they understood. Later, in a monotone voice, the manager read the rules aloud. Vocabulary and sentence complexity made these rules difficult to understand, even for teachers. Teachers avoided admitting that they were confused. Next, all applicants for hotel work were individaully interviewed in the employee cafeteria, in front of anyone who happened to be using the facilities at the time. Teachers felt nervous and found it "hard to think" in such an impersonal situation. In addition, depending on the potential position, some applicants were given polygraph tests.

Other teachers had different experiences. Some had structured interviews where a variety of people in the company had part in it. Tours of the facilities were provided by the newspaper, the snack cracker company and the credit corporation. Tours as part of hiring procedures were routine for the cracker company. Stressing their emphasis on good employer-employee relationships, candidates were asked to indicate which jobs they found most appealing while on tour. At the other businesses, teachers thought the tours were a special courtesy given to them because of the program, and not a routine procedure for many potential employees.

During the initial days on the job, teachers found they were very tired at the end of eight hours work. One teacher was astounded by the size of the company and felt lost in the plant where she worked. Another had received no instructions on use of the service elevator, but was expected to use it as part of the job. Company policy and rules which had been stressed during the interview were not enforced on some job sites,

while at others, rules were strictly enforced. Teachers also found unwritten and unspoken rules existed among the employees. For example, one participant was briefly shunned by her fellow workers at the hotel because she had not prepared the coffee, but no one had told her this was part of the job.

The control educators experience in schools was missing in the business environments, and they were often ill at ease. Safety signs, manual labor, uniforms and certain freedoms were adjustments for many. One teacher was stunned by a prominently displayed sign outside the steel company where he was about to begin work. The sign read: 4 days without an accident. Hazardous conditions appeared to be an accepted part of some jobs. During the initial week at the steel manufacturing plant, red-hot bars of steel jumped off the track several times, and no one had warned the teacher participant of this danger.

After being on the job a short while, all teachers reported that fellow employees were very helpful. Co-workers aided participants in accepting the reality of the job which in some cases differed from the manager's original descriptions and expectations. Short cuts were also learned for completing the day's work requirements within the specified time limits. Although the educational and economic backgrounds of many fellow workers were quite different from the participants, the teachers grew to like, appreciate and respect the other employees.

Many teachers also reported that they enjoyed the relaxed, care-free lunch hour which was part of the work routine. This situation was contrasted with their school schedule where teachers eat lunch within a thirty minute period, sometimes with students.

During the final weeks of the program, most participants had mixed

feelings about leaving the job. Although the work for some had grown mundane, relationships with fellow employees were enjoyable. Others felt like regular full-time employees; they mentioned feeling comfortable in their position, and unfinished tasks were of concern.

In reflecting on the experiences, educators believed they had an unusual opportunity to gain first-hand experience of work in a different environment. Participants spoke of self-confidence and accomplishments. Several expressed pleasure at performing well on jobs other than teaching. One said that because she had only been in one profession for some time, she had feared she would not be able to do other things. She had been surprised and "grew to love the job."

All participants referred to specific skills they had learned. Most spoke of having increased their ideas about ways to look for a job. Several were pleased to find that skills they had developed in teaching were transferable to a different setting, e.g., organization. Others were aware of learning new jargon and vocabulary. Relating more easily to a broader range of people and viewing blue collar workers more sympathetically due to their hard work and low pay were insights mentioned. Some said they felt increased appreciation of their own work - teaching.

In the last series of interviews, we looked at changes teachers saw in themselves as a result of the course and implications of those changes for the classroom. Teachers said they had become more sympathetic with students in entry-level positions. Having experienced the pressures themselves, they could better relate to the feelings of the students. They would encourage students to consider the long range possibilities when selecting an entry-level job. Some jobs were "deadends" with no chance of advancement while others had long-term potential. Teachers talked about emphasizing in classrooms those aspects which they had found

to be most important in obtaining and keeping a job. Establishing satisfying relationships with other workers was seen as significantly related to job satisfaction and performance. Punctuality, dependability, cooperative work attitude, the ability to communicate with others were frequently listed also. Some were going to focus more time on problem solving and encouraging student independence. This interest in student independence relates to the positive shift on the questionnaire regarding the belief that economically disadvantaged students can direct themselves and assume responsibility for their career plans. A few participants noted that now they could reinforce the concepts they have been developing in the classroom already with anecdotes of personal experiences.

More effective counseling with students and parents was cited by most teachers as a probable change which would occur in their classrooms. Teachers said that the program had given them experience in working with people of a wide range of ability. They also gained insight into the lives of people who had little education. Many of the students in the participants' classes have parents similiar to those the teachers worked with during the summer. Thus, teachers believed the experience and insight they gained will result in increased understanding of students and parents.

Employer Interviews

Employers cited many advantages and benefits of the program to them and their companies. Providing the participant a first-hand experience with the business, which would result in the teacher better preparing students to enter the working world, was mentioned most frequently by employers. Others noted that they had a definite need for additional personnel at that time of year and therefore having the teachers was helpful. Employers reported that teachers "fit in well" were "a pleasure

to work with" and performed their duties very capably. Participants also received favorable reactions from fellow employees.

Employers also had suggestions for improvements in the program. Most would prefer earlier notice of program availability for planning purposes. They also suggested a standard wage for all teachers. Employers also requested increased dialogue between educators and business people. Although some had made presentations at the weekly seminars, nearly all suggested that interaction be increased in a variety of ways. Some volunteered to speak to the group while others talked of visiting participants' classrooms to talk about their businesses, hiring practices and desired characteristics in personnel.

Results of business interviews indicates that this part of the program needs reconsideration. Although business personnel thought the Institute was valuable and would participate in it again, they tended to cite more benefits for educators than for themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Results of employer interviews indicated that the exchange of information between educational and business personnel was not as mutual as had been hoped. Programs in career education need to develop strategies for providing more information to businesspeople about educational needs faced by disadvantaged youth and ways educators are attempting to meet these.

Currently little opportunity for exchange among regular classroom teachers, guidance counselors, and vocational instructors exists. In the future, career education in-service programs could be composed with a balance of these three groups in mind.

This fall a variation of this program using on-site visits has been adopted by the local school district. Because of this interest in career education, development of systematic and responsive in-service to update educational personnel is recommended. Based on the findings of this study, having a work experience component as part of such a program is advisable. The length of time, six weeks, enabled participants to become involved, make contributions, and feel some success.